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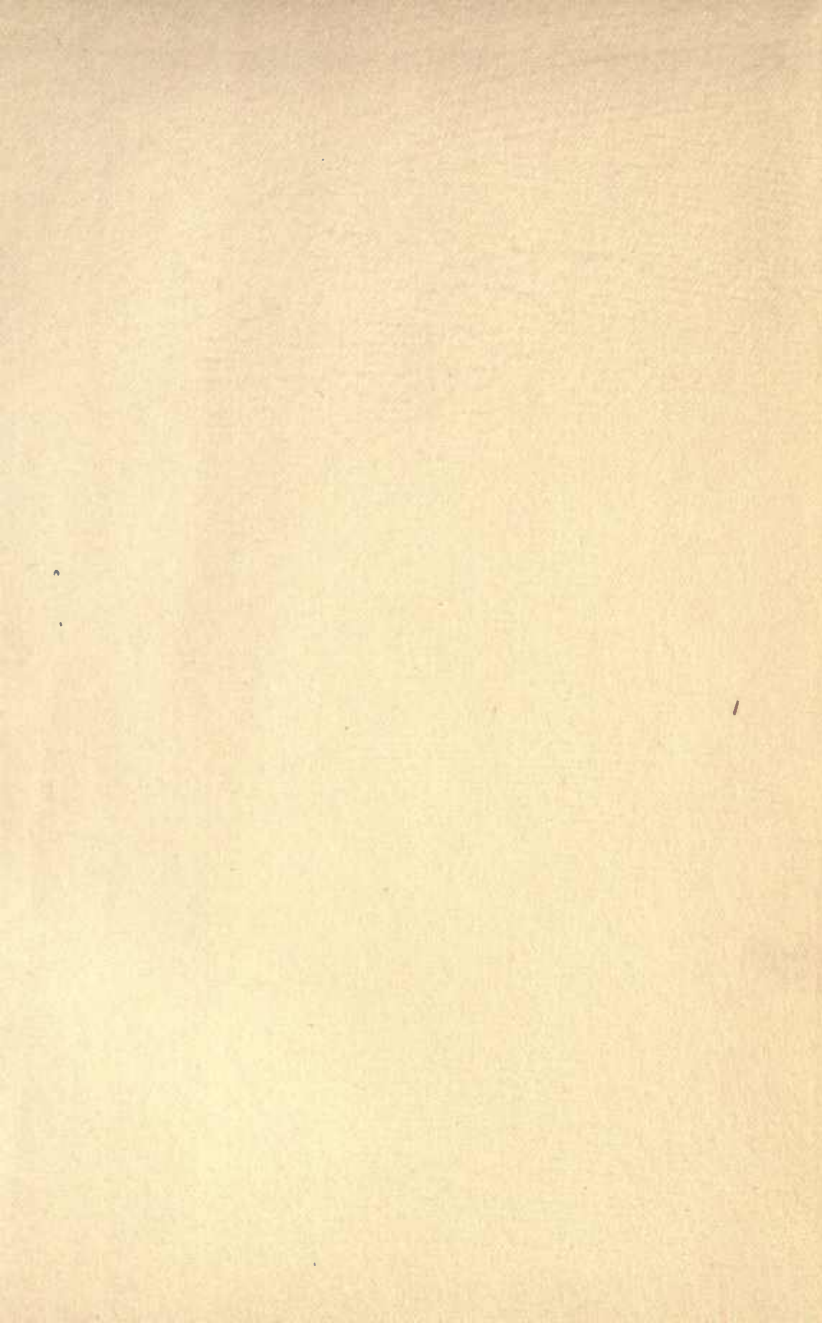
Contemporary Dramatists Series

Death and the Fool

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

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DEATH AND THE FOOL

Contemporary Dramatists Series

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Contemporary Dramatists Series

DEATH AND THE FOOL

A DRAMA IN
ONE ACT BY

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

*Translated from the German
with the Consent of the Author
by ELISABETH WALTER*



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HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL, pioneer of the symbolic movement in German literature, was born in Vienna February 1, 1874. His father, a notable lawyer, and "Vorstand des Rechts-bureau der Oestreich-Zentral-Boden-Kredit-Bank" in Vienna, is descended of an ancient Austrian family, which in 1835 had been raised to the aristocracy. Hugo received his early education at the gymnasium in Vienna and later attended the university there to study law and Romanic philology. After attaining the doctorate, he devoted himself to literary work. At the remarkably early age of seventeen he published his first dramatic study *Gestern*, employing the pseudonym, Theophil Morren. This was immediately followed by the dramas, *Der Tod des Tizian* in 1892, and *Der Tor und der Tod* in 1893, written under the penname of Loris. In 1899 the volume, *Theater in Versen* appeared, containing the dramas, *Die Hochzeit der Zobeide*, *Die Frau im Fenster*, and *Der Abendteurer und die Saengerin*. Two volumes of short plays were published in 1906 under the title *Kleine Dramen*. From these purely lyrical and romantic works, Hofmannsthal turned to the great psychological dramas of literature. He

rewrote Sophocles' *Elektra* in 1903, his *Oedipus Rex* in 1904, and *Oedipus and the Sphinx* in 1906. Otway's *Venice Preserved* was modernised under the title *Das Gerettete Venedig*, in 1904. On this side of the Atlantic Hofmannsthal is perhaps best known as the poet of the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* which was first published in 1911. Besides these dramatic poems Hofmannsthal issued two volumes of verses, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 1903 and *Gesammelte Gedichte* 1907. His prose writings include *Talks on Literary Subjects* 1905 and *Prose Works* 1907.

To Hermann Bahr belongs the distinction of having first discovered the genius of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The youthful author of *Gestern*, however, was not long dependent upon his friends for initiation into art circles, but soon spread his wings to soar to atmospheres but little known to his fore-runners. He became one of the select circle that gathered around Stephan George and without doubt may be reckoned its most illustrious member. This circle is representative of that new movement in literature known as the symbolistic school whose aims and methods are diametrically opposed to those of the naturalistic and realistic schools. In a magazine, *Blaetter fuer die Kunst* (*Art Leaflets*) issued by this group of young Viennese poets, the aims of symbolism were set forth in the following words:

—"An art for art's sake, which is therefore immediately opposed to that hackneyed and inferior movement which had its source in a mistaken conception of reality. Nor can this art occupy itself with world reform, or dreams of an all-round felicity, dreams that are very beautiful in their way, but belong to a realm not akin to poetry."

Unlike most youthful authors these men scorned publicity. The Art Leaflets were never to be had for money, but were given to the select few whom genius deemed worthy. In this magazine *Death and the Fool* first appeared in 1893, nor was it placed on sale in book form until seven years later, when it met with such general favor among the German reading public that within ten years twelve editions had been exhausted. It was the influence of Nietzschean philosophy that prompted this desire to avoid publicity, this aristocratic reserve. And it was also Nietzschean influence that led these writers to express themselves in aphorisms and oracular maxims, rather than in the more plain but oftentimes labored language of the realists.

Hofmannsthal has expressed the diversity of aims of the two schools in these words:—"Between the older art and the art of to-day there is indeed great conflict. We want no invention of narratives, but the reproduction of emotions; no contemplation, but representation; not amusement, but impression.

The majority of the older poets created their work according to certain popular tenets, or what they desired the world to accept as principle. We, on the contrary, view the happenings of an era but as a means of artistic inspiration." Shakespeare had been attracted to the story of Macbeth by the course of events in his history; Goethe was drawn to Iphigenia by her character and personality; but Hofmannsthal felt the forceful impression of a storm of happenings upon a life-throbbing spirit, and it is this that his dramas reproduce. He wrote not to give pleasure, not to instruct, but that he, and with him his audience might taste to the last, aye, to the very dregs, the bitter cup that had been forced to the lips of a suffering humanity. It is this that has given such fearful force to his historical plays. Mood and sensation are all important, character and events are only a means of creating the same. Neither time nor place binds the new-romanticists. In their abrupt turning from the naturalistic trend of their contemporaries, they reach back through the ages into the cultured world of dead nations. In this feeling at one with the people and customs of far gone days Hofmannsthal is unsurpassed. His favorite field is the time of the Renaissance.

With the hand of a magician he weaves symbolic dreams unutterably rich in color and melody. His plays are lyrical records of deep and poignant emo-

tion occupied with the spiritual adventures of soul, and mysterious as the mystery of a spirit's moods. A disciple of D'Annunzio and Wilde, he far surpasses both in the lyrical quality of his verse, which in its magnificent resonance is as the orchestration of nature and humanity. A true word-artist, he chooses his phrases with remarkable nicety, ever pregnant with meaning and of piercing sweetness. The perfection of his rhymes never palls, but at all times is suited to the crest or trough of feeling embodied, verse gliding into verse as wave overtaking wave.

E. W.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Death

Claudio, a Nobleman

His Valet

Claudio's Mother

Claudio's Sweetheart

His Chum

Claudio's House

Costumes of 1820

} *Dead*

Death and the Fool

Claudio's study in the style of Louis XVI. In the background right and left are large windows, in the center a glass door leading out to the balcony from which a wooden staircase leads down into the garden. At the left a white folding door, at the right a similar one opening into his bedroom which is shut off with a green velvet portier. A desk near the window at the right, a chair in front of it. To the pillars are fastened glass cabinets containing antiques. Close to the wall at the right is a dark Gothic carved chest, ancient musical instruments hang above it. A picture by an old Italian master is almost black with age. The wall is covered with a very light wall-paper, stucco and gilt.

CLAUDIO alone.

He is seated at the window. Sunset.

The distant hills against th' horizon rear
Their crown'd heads 'twixt rays of sun declining,

A wreath afloat in gilded atmosphere
Of snowy clouds with shadows deep entwining.
So were the clouds of ancient masters painted
That bear aloft the Virgin Mother sainted.
The precipice in sombre blue is shrouded,
The hollow vale of mountain shadows kissed,
The glistening meads in evening gray are clouded,
One suntinged peak gleams forth an amethyst.
With jealous pangs my yearning soul regards
The fortunate who golden fields have planted,
The earth their weary, fulsome toil rewards,
Them happy weariness of limb is granted.
With feet unshod, upon the fragrant heather
The morning wind disports in summer's glare;
He wakens them. The bees their honey gather
Near them; they breathe God's glorious, sunny air.
Nature's their lowly slave, and they inherit
Her choicest gifts; their wealth my soul doth taunt.
Between alternate fresh and wearied spirit,
To them no fortune's blessing is unwont.
The golden orb doth shift its place and sinks
Into the gleaming crystal of the sea,
The last faint streak on distant treetop blinks.
Now reddish smoke doth hover hazily,

Now fiery glare upon the shore—'tis there
Great cities lie, with arms of Naiades
In monstrous cradles high their children bear;
A noble people and audacious. These
The unexplor'd ocean waves patrol
That ne'er before were cut by any keel.
The anger of the sea doth rouse the soul,
And every pain and passionate pang doth heal.
Thus meaning, and thus blessing I behold
Spread over all—I gaze there longingly,
But meaningless is all, and pain untold
Doth fill the things, the scenes that nearer me.
So seems my life insensate, wholly wasted,
Confined within these walls, these streets my lot.
With unshed tears 'twas full, and joys untasted,
And yearning for, alas, I know not what.

He stands at the window.

They light their candles now, and they attain
Within their walls a narrowed world and dull,
With all that holds the human heart in chain,
Of joys and tears and pain 'tis full.
Each heart to each is ope; they share

Misgivings o'er the traveler not returned,
With cheering words they comfort, drive out care;
(Ah me, to comfort I have never learned.)
They know what tone each anguished hour calls,
To cull or smile or tear what word is needing,
Nor ever knock on sevenfold nailed walls
With wounded fingers torn and bleeding.

.

What do I know of life of man?

As an outsider did I view it,

I could not weave my soul into it,

Was in it but not of the clan.

Myself I never could forget,

Nor give, nor take, like others blessed;

My soul ne'er understanding met.

Tho many fond lips mine have pressed

I never drank the cup of happiness,

I never knew a deep and poignant anguish,

Nor sobbing trod the path of loneliness.

Whene'er of Heaven's choicest gifts in me

A fluttering caused, a thrill, immediately

My ever wakeful brain, forgetfulness

Unknowing, boldly spoke its name;

Comparisons arose, and with them came
Mistrust, and robbed me of all joyousness.
And agony—devoid of colouring,
By contemplation torn, dissected quite—
How could I press that horrid, mangled thing
Unto my breast and suck its rare delight?
Its wings just grazed and wearied me,
Uneasiness I felt, not agony. . . .

With a sudden start.

'Tis darkening, I ponder foolishly.
Ah, Time, indeed, hath various progeny.
But I am tired, I shall try to sleep.

The valet brings in a lamp and immediately withdraws.

In glaring light once more the lamp doth steep
For me this storeroom's lifeless frippery,
Through which I fain by stealthy way had crept,
Since barred the open path must ever be,
Into that life for which I yearning wept.

He stops in front of the Crucifix.

At Thy poor, wounded feet of ivory,
Oh, Savior crucified, have many knelt,
To quench the burning flames prayed fervently,
That in their hearts so marvelously dwelt;
And when an icy chill the glow displaced,
Repentance vain, and fierce remorse they faced.

He stands in front of the old picture.

Giaconda, from a background wondrous
Thy soulful form in mystic splendor gleams,
Thy mouth austere, and sweet mysterious,
Thine eyelids weighted down with golden dreams;
Hast just so much of life to me reveal'd
As my interrogating soul to thee did yield.

He turns to the chest.

Ye cups, upon whose cool refreshing rim
Full many lips in rapture rare have hung,
Ye ancient lutes, whose twanging strings have sung
To man oppressed of woe, and solaced him,
Ah, could ye weave your magic spell o'er me
How glad your willing prisoner I should be.

Ye wooden, and ye brazen shields of old,
With strange devices half concealed, half bold,
Ye cherubs, grifons, fauns, and toads,
Fantastic birds, and fruit of jungle weird,
Intoxicating things and to be feared,
Wert born of some deep human heart's emotion,
Art progeny of palpitating moods,
Washed upward by the mighty waves of ocean;
And as the net the fish, so form imprisoned ye.
In vain, alas, in vain, I followed ye,
Your charms as fetters ever have I felt.
And tho like masks in turn I donned your souls
That quivered so with life, and in them dwelt,
Nor life, nor hearts, or world of me were visioned,
Held by these as a swarm of motes imprisoned;
While Harpies, cold, repellent, guarded e'er
Each cool, refreshing spring's sweet blossoms fair.
The artificial so completely bound me
That dead mine eyes looked on the golden sun,
And deaf mine ears were to the world around me.
The mystic curse forever on my head,
Ne'er conscious quite, ne'er quite my senses lost,
To live my life e'en as a book that read
Is understood but half, while for the rest the brain

Gropes in the sombre realms of life and gropes in
vain.

And all that pleased, and all that made me sad,
It seemed as tho no meaning of itself it had.
Nay, this was naught but future life's foreseeing,
A hollow picture of completer being.
In sorrows and in love I battled ever
'Gainst shadows, all my sense bewildered quite,
Employed my instincts but exhausted never,
And vaguely dreamed that day would follow night.
I turned and looked upon this life
Wherein no race was ever won by speed,
And bravery is not an aid in strife,
Where sorrows sadden not nor joys make glad,
Where senseless answers senseless questions breed.
Entangled dreams rise in the harrowed mind,
And chance rules all, the hour, wave, and wind.
So painfully astute and mortified
In wearied pride, with disappointment faint,
I lie deep buried here without complaint,
Within these walls, this town do I abide;
The people, too, have ceased to give me heed,
They've found that I am commonplace indeed.

The valet enters with a plateful of cherries which he places on the table, then turns to close the doors of the balcony.

CLAUDIO

Why shut the doors so soon? What's frightened you?

THE VALET

Your Honor wont believe it if I tell.

To himself, fearfully.

And now they've hidden in the arbor there!

CLAUDIO

Why who?

THE VALET

Your pardon, sir, I do not know;
It seems an army of uncanny folk.

CLAUDIO

Beggars?

THE VALET

I do not know.

CLAUDIO

Oh, shut the door
That leads from out the garden to the street,
Then go to bed and bother me no more.

THE VALET

'Tis even that has just alarmed me so,
The garden gate is bolted, but—

CLAUDIO

But what?

THE VALET

They're sitting in the garden even now,
Upon the sandstone figure of Apollo some,

A pair are hidden in the shadows there
Beneath the fountain, one is on the Sphinx,
The yewtree hides him, you can't see him now.

CLAUDIO

Are they men?

THE VALET

Some men and women also,
Not beggar-folk, old fashioned are their clothes.
They look just like the etchings on your walls.
In such appalling manner there they sit,
With eyes that stare at one as empty air.
They can't be human beings. Your Honor, pray,
Be not annoyed, but not for all the world
Would I go out in their vicinity,
Pray God, to-morrow they'll have disappeared.
And now, with your permission, sir, I'll close
The doors and bolt them too, and all the locks
With holy water I shall sprinkle. 'Cause
I've never yet seen humans looked like those,
And eyes like theirs are not in human heads.

CLAUDIO

Do as you like and now good-night.

He walks musingly up and down the room. Behind the scenes are heard the yearning, mournful strains of a violin, soft and distant at first, gradually coming nearer, until at last the full, warm notes seem to come from the adjoining room.

CLAUDIO

Music?

Rare music, too, that speaks unto the soul!
The fellow's nonsense has bewitched me quite,
Methinks no human hand e're culled
Such tones from out a violin.

Remains in listening attitude turned toward the right.

It seems as tho my soul 'twere rending
In tremors solemn, deep, supernal,
It seems to speak remorse unending,

And sings of hope, sweet hope eternal;
As tho from out these ancient walls and wide
My life unrolled before me glorified.
'Tis like a mother's or a loved one's ent'ring;
Like every long lost one's return
It rouses thoughts 'round good things cent'ring,
That in my breast with youthful fire burn.
When beauteous Spring in boyhood did inflame me,
The vast unknown brought quickening to my blood,
A yearning, boundless, infinite, o'ercame me,
An apprehensive, wild, prophetic flood.
Then days of wandering came, intoxicating,
When all the world was bathed in wondrous light,
And roses bloomed, and bells rang celebrating,
And ecstasy was 'round me and delight.
What throbbing life all things then did contain!
What meaningfulness all things then acquired!
I felt my soul enraptured, felt inspired,
I living link within the human chain.
And love I then divined, the mighty stream
That nourisheth all hearts, thru mine heart urged;
And a contentment, that not e'en in dream
I now know, then thru all my being surged.
Sing on, oh mystic music, sing to me,

And stir my sluggish soul unto its source!
It seems, reviewed thus retrospectively,
My life in joy and warmth had run its course.
The crust of age subsideth meltingly
Beneath this fiery glow of youthful force;
The useless learning which my wilful choice
In weary weight upon these shoulders lays,
Is lost before the great Primordial Voice,
These sacred tones, this call of childhood days.
While heralded afar with bells loud ringing,
A new life cometh forth, a new awaking,
In forms to which is boundless meaning clinging,
Sincerely great in giving and in taking.

The music ceases suddenly.

Ah, there, 'tis silent now, the violin!
Divinely human grace I felt therein.
And he who so had power to enchant
Most likely standeth in the street below
And holdeth out his hat, a mendicant.

He goes to the window at the right.

I do not see him here. Indeed 'tis strange!
Where may he be? Perhaps at t'other window.

While Claudio moves toward the door at the right, the curtain is softly drawn, and Death stands revealed in the doorway, bow in hand, and his fiddle hanging from his belt. He calmly views Claudio, who has drawn back in extreme terror.

CLAUDIO.

Why does such senseless fear the joy displace
With which ere now I did thy notes attend?
Whence comes this spasm as I view thy face?
What binds my throat? What draws my hair on
end?

Begone! Thou art the Death! What wouldst thou
here?

I am afeared! Begone! My voice fails me!

He sinks to the floor.

I cannot breathe! I stifle! Air, oh, air!
Begone! Who called thee? Go! Who oped to thee?

DEATH.

Arise! Cast this hereditary fear from thee!
I am no grewsome thing, no skeleton.

From Venus I'm descended, Dionysos' son,
The god of Souls before thee thou dost see.
When thou thru summer shadows going,
Hast seen a leaf borne thru the gilded air,
'Tis then my breath hath touched thee, thou un-
knowing,
That dreamlike doth all ripened things ensnare
Whenever overflowing feelings fill
Thy trembling soul with flood of warmth and light,
Whene'er in momentary thrill
The vast Unknown is brought before thy sight,
And thou surrend'ring to the wheel of fate
Dost look upon the world as thine estate;
In every truly solemn hour
That made thine earthly form to quiver,
I touched thy soul's foundation ever
With sacred, with mysterious power.

CLAUDIO.

Enough. I greet thee now as 'tis becoming,
Tho nervous still.

Short pause.

But say what means thy coming?

DEATH.

My coming, friend, hath but one meaning e'er.

CLAUDIO.

But surely I have time and much to spare!
Behold, the leaf ere from the branch 'tis freed
With all the sap of life hath been imbued,
I've not had that! I have not lived, indeed!

DEATH.

Hast not like others too thy way pursued?

CLAUDIO.

Like meadow flowers, torn and cast
Upon the turbid rushing stream,
The days of my youth onward passed;
That such was life, I knew not, did not dream.
And then—I stood at life's gates, longingly,

Delicious apprehension in my heart,
Expecting in majestic storms to see
A sudden miracle burst them apart.
It came not so to pass. And once I stood
Within, the sacredness was gone, then did
Desire, too, my memory elude,
And neath a ban I was those things amid.
Bewildered by the twilight, nigh submerged,
Impatient, sore, my inner being scourged,
Half-heartedly, with all my senses numb,
In every whole mysteriously thwarted,
I ne'er by inner fires was overcome,
On mighty waves my soul was ne'er transported.
Nor was I e'er with that God face to face
With whom one must contend to gain his grace.

DEATH.

Thou didst receive as all earth's mortals, too,
A mortal life to live as others do.
A faithful spirit you within ye bear,
Which to this chaos of unmeaning things
Analogy, interpretation brings,
And bids ye plant your garden there

Of sorrow, mercy, and efficiency.
Ah, woe to thee, that must be taught by me!
Some men are born to bind, and some are bound.
With sultry hours and storms does growth abound.
With tear-wet lids, and worn, harassed by care,
Still yearning, wishing still, half in despair,
Deep breathing, and with love of life still warm,
But ripened all, ye fall into my arm.

CLAUDIO

I am not ripe, indeed, so pass me by.
I will no longer foolishly lament,
But from this mortal soil I'll not be rent.
A longing deep, for life doth in me cry.
Before this dreadful fear the ban doth give,
I feel it now—I can—oh, let me live!
I feel it in this infinite, wild yearning,
My heart a love for earthly things is learning.
Oh, thou shalt see, no more a poor dumb brute
Or puppet, shall another seem to me;
No heart to me, hereafter, shall be mute.
All joys I'll force, I'll share each misery.
And faithfulness, that doth all life sustain,

I will acquire. . . . And so my life I'll live,
That good and evil over me shall reign,
And to my heart or grief, or smile shall give.
The mundane scheme with meaning new conceiving,
Now human beings on my way I'll find;
No longer mutely giving, and receiving,
I will be bound, and I, I, too, will bind!

Perceiving Death's unmoved expression, his terror increases.

Why see, believe me, 'twas not so before!
Thou thinkst I have known hate, known love di-
vine?

Ah, no, the kernel never yet was mine,
'Twas empty seeming, words, and nothing more.
Behold, I'll prove this thing, these letters, see,

He takes a bundle of old letters from a drawer.

The vows, the tender notes that thru them thread,
Dost think that I had felt these things as she?
Or as my letters writ in answer said?

He throws the packet at Death's feet; the letters are scattered over the floor.

There keep this whole, this empty amorous life,
Where I reecho e'er, and I'm supreme,
Where borne on crest or trough of human strife,
I sway, and every sacred thing blaspheme.
There! There! And all things else are but as this,
Devoid of sense, or love, or hate, or bliss!

DEATH

Thou fool! Thou senseless fool, true reverence
For life I'll teach thee e're thou goest hence.
Stand there, and learn, and silently behold
That others, when from out this life were going,
Their veins with human rapture sweet were flowing,
And thou alone wast unresponsive, cold.

Death plays a few notes on fiddle and calls. He stands near the door of the bedroom; in the foreground, at the right; Claudio is near the wall at the left, in semi-darkness. His Mother enters at the door at the right. She is not very old. She wears a long, black velvet dress. A black velvet cap with white ruche frames her face. In her white delicate hands she carries a lace handkerchief. She

steps softly through the doorway, and walks noiselessly about the room.

HIS MOTHER

How many tender pangs this atmosphere
For me doth hold. A faint and subtle breath
As tho of flowers of lavender, doth waft
To me one half of all my earthly life.
A mother's life, ah well, 'tis one-third pain,
One-third 'tis anguish, one-third care. What knows
A man of that?

She stops at the chest.

Is still the edge as keen?
He fell against it once, and cut his head;
He was quite small and headstrong, then, and wild,
He would not be controlled. The window, ah!
There oft I stood, and stared into the night,
And eagerly I listened for his step,
When dread misgiving drove me out of bed.
And when he came not, tho the clock struck two,
And then struck three, the dawn began to glimmer . . .

How oft . . . But he has never known of
that . . .

By day I, too, was oftentimes quite alone.

One's hands, they tend the flowers, and they dust,
And shake the pillows, polish bright the brass,
Thus goes the day; one's head, alas, has naught
To do; a dull and heavy wheel turns there,
With vague forebodings and dark dreams 'tis
freighted,

And inexplicable anxiety.

It must be portion of that sacred state
Of holy, transcendental motherhood,
Allied to all profound, mysterious working
In this world. But 'tis not given me
To longer breathe this sweet, oppressive air,
This pain-frought atmosphere of bygone days.
Yes, I must go, must go. . . .

Exit through middle door.

CLAUDIO

Mother!

DEATH

Silence!

Thou canst not call her back!

CLAUDIO

Oh, mother, come!

And let me once, just once, with my lips feel
Thy quivering own, so tightly pressed, lest they
The prideful silence break; and let me kneel
Before thee, thus . . . Oh, call her! Bid her
stay!

Didst thou not see, she did not want to go?
Inhuman one, why dost compel her so?

DEATH

Grudge not what's mine. Thou hadst her.

CLAUDIO

Aye! And ne'er

I felt it! Barren quite! When did I e'er
Within me know each fibre of my being
With yearning for her throb? And when did so
Her presence like a sacred deity
Engulf my trembling soul o'erwhelmingly,
In human passion, human joy, and woe!

Death, indifferent to Claudio's lament, plays a simple folk-melody. A young Girl enters, softly. She wears a plain, large figured dress, laced shoes, a small scarf about her neck. She is bareheaded.

THE GIRL

'Twas beautiful! Don't you think of it more?
'Tis true, you hurt me deeply, deeply,
But then, what is't that does not end in pain?
The happy days I've seen, are very few,
And these, they were as good as any dream!
The flowers at the window, my own flowers,
The little joggling spinnet, there the clothespress,
In which I laid away your letters, and
What little gifts you brought me . . . all
these things—
Don't laugh at me—grew beautiful again,
And talked to me with living, loving lips.
When rain on sultry, summer evening fell,
And we stood at the window . . . oh, the
fragrance
Of the humid trees! . . . All that is gone!
And now is dead all that was living then,

Lies buried in our sweet love's little grave.
Ah, but 'twas beautiful, and you're to blame
For all its beauty! Then you cast me off,
Threw me aside, unthinking, cruel, as
A child, of playing wearied, drops his flowers.
Ah, God, I did have naught to hold you!

A pause.

Your letter came, the last, the dreadful one;
And then I wished to die. Not to distress you
Do I tell you this. One letter more
I meant to write in parting; no lament,
Not passionate, or fierce, unbridled grief,
But just to make you yearn a bit for me,
And teach you to feel homesick for my love,
And shed a few tears, 'cause 'twas then too late.
I did not write that letter, no, why should I?
I could not know how much of your real heart
Was in all this, that so with glittering
And so with fever filled my senses full,
That thru the day I walked as in a dream.
No good intent turns faithlessness to truth.
And tears can not recall that which is dead.

One does not die of these things. Nay, much later,
After long and weary misery 'twas granted
That I might lay me down and die. I prayed
That in your last hour I might come to you,
Not horrible, not to torment you then,
But as the cup of wine that one has drunk
And set aside, its fragrance vague recalls
A distant, half forgotten, gentle joy.

Exit.

Claudio buries his face in his hands. A Man enters immediately after. He is apparently of Claudio's age. He is carelessly dressed in a dusty traveling suit. The wooden handle of a knife protrudes from his left breast-pocket. He remains standing in the center of the stage facing Claudio.

THE MAN.

And are you living still, eternal trifler?
And do you still read Horace, and take pride
In mocking brilliancy and unmoved heart?
With pretty speech you found your way to me,

Pretended interest in what moved me.
You said that I brought things up in your mind
That secret slept in you; just as the wind
Of night at times of distant goal doth whisper.
O, yes, a fine Eolian harp, indeed,
You were, and ever was the lovesick wind
For it, another's worn, exhausted breath,
'Twas mine or someone else's. We had been
Good chums for years. Good chums? That is
 'twixt us

Was common conversation day and night.
We had the same acquaintances, and played
Alike with women. Common, even as
Between a master and his slave is common
His house, his sedan, dog, and meals, and whip.
To one the house is pleasure, t'other, prison;
Him the sedan bears, while he its weight
Upon his shoulder feels; one in the garden
Frolics with the dog, the other waits on it.
Emotions half completed, pearls, in pain
My soul had once conceived, you took from me,
And as your playthings threw them up in air.
You, quick to chum, and quick t' have done with
 friends;

I, with silent wooing in my soul
And teeth fast locked; while you without constraint
At all things fumbled, I stood by abashed,
Confused, my words died ere I spoke them.
A Woman came upon our path. And I
Was overcome as with a dreadful illness,
Wherein the senses reel with overstrain
From having gazed too long toward one desire,
One goal, with fascinating melancholy,
With fragrance filled, and fiery glow, as lightning
Thru sombre darkness hovers. And you, too,
Beheld these things and were attracted.—“Yes,
“Because I, too, am just like that at times;
“The Girl’s rare lassitude allured me,
“Her stern disdain, her chastened mien, all this
“In one so young.” Did you not tell me this
In later years? It all allured you so!
To me ’twas more than merely blood and brains!

And satiated, then, to me you flung
The puppet, all defaced her image was
In you with surfeit, terribly disfigured,
Of all her wondrous charm she was denuded,
Her features senseless, and her living hair

Hung dead ; You threw a spectre to me,
With your vile art to brutish nothingness
You analyzed her sweet and subtle charm.
For this, at last, I hated you, e'en as
In dim foreboding I had always hated,
And I avoided you.

Then Destiny

At last my shattered spirit blessed and placed
Once more an aim and will within my breast,
Which was not quite dead to all good endeavor
Despite your poisonous proximity,
Aye, for a lofty purpose, Destiny
Drove me to seek death thru this murd'rous blade,
Which flung me down into a wayside ditch.
There lying, I by slow degrees decayed,
For reasons which you could not comprehend ;
And still was thrice more blessed than you, who ne'er
Was aught to one, nor any aught to you.

Exit.

CLAUDIO.

Was naught to one, nor any aught to me.

Slowly rising.

As on the stage a poor comedian
In answer to his cue comes, speaks his part,
And goes, indifferent toward all things, dull,
The sound of his own voice doth leave him cold,
Nor have his hollow tones aught power to move,
So I have gone upon the stage of life,
Have walked across it, void of power and worth.
Why did this hap to me? Thou, Death, oh why
Didst thou first have to teach me life to see,
No longer thru a veil, alert and whole,
Here waking somewhat, and thus passing on?
And wherefore is with such exalted presage
Of things of life, the childish spirit cleft,
That when those things at last have come to pass
But empty thrills of memory are left?
Why sings for us no magic violin,
Wherein the mystic spirit world's revealed
That buried lies each human breast within,
As blossoms buried 'neath the mountain slide?
Could I but be with thee, and hear but thee,
Unthwarted by aught petty mystery!
I can! Grant unto me as thou hast said,

Be thou my life, Death, since my life was dead!
What forces me, who neither state affirm,
To call thee death, and t'other life to term?
More living life than all life ever held
Thou didst confine within one little hour.
With earthly phantoms from my brain dispelled,
I give myself unto thy mystic power.

He stops a moment to reflect.

Mayhap 'tis but a dying, feeble notion,
Washed upward by my deadly, wakeful blood,
But ne'er before in living, fierce emotion
Have I felt thus, it therefore seemeth good.
If now 'tis destined I shall be effaced,
My brain this last hour fully hath embraced;
And life may go with all its soulless sham.
Now that I die, I feel at last I am.
In sleep our dreamed emotions oft amass
Till consciousness at last thru sleep is breaking;
So now do I thru excess feeling pass
From out life's dreaming, unto death's awaking.

He sinks dead at Death's feet.

DEATH

Slowly passes out, shaking his head.

How wonderful these humans are, indeed,
Who do explain the inexplicable,
And what was never writ, they read ;
The intricate they, subjugating, bind,
And thru eternal darkness paths they find.

He goes out thru the middle door, his last words are faintly audible. The room remains quiet. Through the window Death, drawing his bow across the strings, is seen to pass, immediately behind him follow the Mother, the Girl, and a figure closely resembling Claudio.

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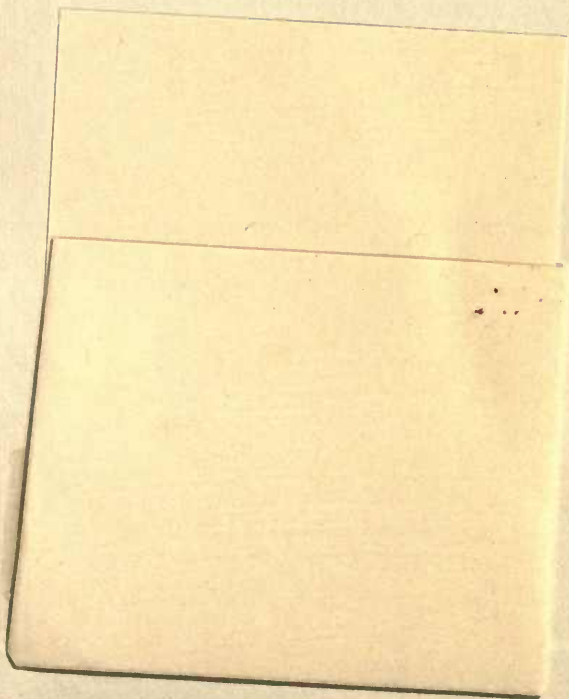
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